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Developments in Indochina

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CAMBODIA

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Sihanouk and the Khmer Communists

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The new public "pro-Sihanouk" stance adopted by the Communists was evident in a message to the Prince from Ieng Sary, the former top Khmer Communist official in Peking who left the Chinese capital in early November to return to the "liberated area" in Cambodia. The message, which was released by the Khmer Communists on December 18, heaped effusive praise on Sihanouk's leadership and his contributions to the insurgency.

These latest developments underscore the Khmer insurgents' continuing problem of maintaining a facade of unity. Sihanouk is not likely to be taken in by kind words. He can be expected to keep making statements that will not set well with the Khmer

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Communists. Last week, for example, he sent a publicized telegram to Senators Mansfield and Fulbright in which he remarked that the fighting in Cambodia "will go on for a long time" because neither side will be able to win a total victory. He also said that the Khmer Communists could not counter "the overwhelming material superiority of the enemy" and again indicated that the insurgents are suffering from munitions shortages. This sort of line from Sihanouk led to a period of thinly veiled squabbling between the Prince and his Communist associates last October.

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A Look at the General Reserve

The Cambodian Army's General Reserve is a vital element in the government's defense plan for the dry season. Originally conceived as a mobile combat force, the general reserve was supposed to provide the army's main offensive punch. The role of the general reserve has changed, however, as Communist military capabilities have grown and the army has become more defense-oriented. It has become in part an intervention force rushed from front to front to bail out ineffective regional units that are responsible for territorial defense. Reserve units were used in this capacity at Kompong Cham early this fall and more recently on Route 4 near Kompong Speu. More important, general reserve units have taken on primary defense responsibilities in the immediate Phnom Penh area. Reserve units bore the brunt of the heavy fighting around the capital last summer and continue to man the city's main defenses.

On paper, the general reserve is composed of four infantry divisions, nine independent infantry brigades, and supporting armor, artillery, engineer, signal, and transportation units. Of this force, the four infantry divisions, six infantry brigades, and most of the support elements are assigned to the

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Phnom Penh area. Total general reserve strength in the region is between 18,000 and 20,000 men.

Four infantry divisions--the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 7th--form the backbone of the reserve. Only the 1st Division is used regularly as an intervention force. The entire unit is now participating in clearing operations along Route 4 near Kompong Speu City, southwest of Phnom Penh. In August, the division acquitted itself well in some sharp fighting along Route 1. Morale reportedly has been hurt by the division's steady involvement in combat and fairly heavy losses.

The 2nd Division now participates in the defense of Route 1 southeast of Phnom Penh and Route 2 just south of the capital. It has performed its mission well in the past few months and has also conducted several relatively successful clearing operations along Route 1. Early this week, division units quickly checked a Communist attempt to cut Route 1 about seven miles southeast of Phnom Penh. Morale in the 2nd is generally good and should improve further now that dependent housing and a free rice ration have been authorized.

Although all units in the general reserve suffer to some degree from manpower shortages, the problem is particularly acute in units of the 3rd Division, which is currently assigned to defensive duties along Routes 201 and 3 southwest of Phnom Penh. The division has long been capable of only a limited and static defensive role. Its morale is low; at the beginning of this month it could muster only 40 percent of its authorized strength.

The general staff has promised the division over 2,000 new recruits, but few have arrived thus far. Lack of transportation compounds the manpower shortage. The transportation problem is being eased by accelerated deliveries of US-supplied vehicles and other types of US military equipment.

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The 7th Division is responsible for defending the area northwest of Phnom Penh. Some improvement in this unit has been noted in recent weeks, but it still suffers from weak leadership and poor tactical planning.

Most of the division's units do have a core of tough, well-trained soldiers who have performed well in combat. With the scheduled arrival of 1,800 replacements later this month, the 7th should become one of the stronger of the reserve divisions. Although the division is still under-strength, morale is generally good as a result of an active program of assistance to military dependents.

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NORTH VIETNAM

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Autumn Harvest Below Expectations

North Vietnam's recent rice harvest probably amounted to a disappointing 2.5 million tons.

According to North Vietnamese press reports, this year's autumn rice crop ranked fifth among those of the past fifteen years, and the output exceeded only the 1968 and 1971 crops. The 1973 crop suffered from drought at the start of the growing season and from flooding caused by typhoons just prior to harvest. The fall harvest, together with the spring harvest (about 1.8 million tons), will probably cover only three quarters of North Vietnam's consumption requirements. To make up for the difference, food imports for this year, already running at record levels, will almost certainly exceed the 1968 peak of about 800,000 tons.

North Vietnam's largest rice crop was in 1959. Although the population has been growing since then, agricultural output was stagnant during the war, causing a widening gap between domestic food supplies and consumption requirements. To remedy this situation, the regime would have to devote greater attention to agriculture and seek long-term solutions, such as improving flood control and irrigation facilities, increasing the use of improved rice strains, intensifying cultivation, applying more fertilizer, and opening new lands for producing secondary crops.

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Jakarta Believes Hanoi the Lesser Evil

Indonesian Foreign Ministry officials have concluded that Hanoi's influence in Laos and Cambodia will inevitably increase, but that a North Vietnamese sphere of influence in Indochina is preferable to a

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Chinese one. Foreign Minister Malik recently told a meeting of Indonesian chiefs of mission that in the future they must foster an atmosphere of cordial co-existence and mutual respect in dealings with their North Vietnamese counterparts.

During the past year, Indonesia has paid attention to re-establishing a good working relationship with North Vietnam. In January, Jakarta sent an ambassador to Hanoi after having left the post vacant for two years. Indonesian foreign policy officials believe that, with careful cultivation, Hanoi can be weaned away from its association with Peking and encouraged to identify its interests with those of other Southeast Asian states. Jakarta has already broached the idea of expanding the present Association of Southeast Asian Nations--Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia--to include all the Indochina states. Jakarta hopes to persuade its neighbors, even Hanoi, that regional unity is needed to counter Peking's designs in the area.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

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Buddhist Wrangling Continues

The An Quang Buddhists failed to resolve any of their disputes at their national congress last week. Factional rivalries are likely to persist in the weeks to come. As a result, the Buddhists will be unable to pose much of a political challenge to the Thieu government.

The three-day congress deadlocked over the election of a new An Quang leadership. Tri Quang, who has been the most influential An Quang leader for many years, apparently was unable to impose his will at the congress where his rival, Thien Minh, developed unexpectedly strong support. There were indications just prior to the congress that the two men would agree to compromise and retain members of both factions in the leadership, but the bitterness between the groups apparently was too strong.

Some of the An Quang leaders hope that a new congress will be convened in a few months to elect a new leadership. In the meantime, internal frictions may become greater than ever. One of Tri Quang's supporters reportedly plans to mount a press campaign to discredit Thien Minh in hopes of having him expelled from the An Quang movement.

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